THE POLITICS DEPARTMENT’S ASSESSMENT CYCLE

The Politics Department’s marking practices reflect its commitment to the principles of fairness, transparency and consistency. Some of our assessment methods are meant to monitor the progress that students make during the year while others help us monitor the final outcome of the teaching and learning process.

1. Essays (u/g at levels 5, 6 and p/g at level 7)
   a. Essay questions reflect the module’s content and often reflect past exam papers.
   b. Essay deadlines are spread over the year (November and February for p/g students; December, January, March for u/g students) so as to spread our busy students’ workload as well.
   c. Essays that count for at least 30% of a module mark are marked by two academics, including at least one who actually teaches the module in question. Essays submitted at levels 5 and 6 are moderated, i.e. they are marked by at least one academic who teaches the course and a large sample is second-marked by another internal examiner.
   d. A large sample of essays is also seen by one external examiner (see below).
   e. All essay marks remain informal until the meeting of the relevant board of examiners (see below).
   f. Feedback on essays is a key learning tool for all students since part of the exercise is to help them improve their writing skills.
   g. Essay feedback is offered in specific forms that reflect the Department’s publicly available marking criteria and mark descriptors. This feedback is made available to students via Moodle normally no later than four weeks after the deadline for the submission of the essay.

2. Unseen written exams, external examiners and boards of examiners.
   a. The exam-related cycle starts in late January with each academic who teaches a module being asked to choose the questions that will appear in the corresponding exam paper. They ensure that the questions reflect the content of the module as it has actually been taught and minimise overlap between essay questions and exams questions.
   b. Once this has happened several academics from the department meet (usually in February) and scrutinise each exam paper (there is one meeting for undergraduate and a separate one for postgraduate modules). These meetings are chaired by the corresponding exams officer (i.e. the chair of the Politics undergraduate sub-board – currently Dr D. G. Dimitrakopoulos – and the chair of the Politics p/g sub-board, currently Dr A. Bousquet). As a result of these meetings academics are sometimes asked to modify the original formulation of exam questions (e.g. to make them clearer etc.)
   c. Each (still) draft exam paper is then sent to one of the Department’s several external examiners (i.e. academics who work for other institutions and are recruited to ensure that current assessment practices in the Department comply not only with the College’s internal rules but also the best practice
across higher education institutions in the UK). They sometimes ask us to make amendments to our original questions and invariably check that there is no overlap between exam questions and essay questions.

d. The finalised exam papers are then handed over (usually in late February) to Registry which has overall responsibility for all exams across the College.

e. Exams take place between the end of April and the beginning of June.

f. Exam scripts are marked by two internal examiners, at least one of whom normally also teaches the corresponding module. Each one allocates a mark to each answer (coupled with brief comments that justify this mark) and an overall mark per script. In cases of disagreement the two internal examiners discuss the issue and find an agreed mark (or, very rarely, ask a third examiner to adjudicate).

g. The full set of exam scripts, internal exam marks and comments, a selection of essays and the corresponding marks and comments are then sent to the external examiners who scrutinise them and prepare a written report. In other words, each script is seen by three academics and this is a key reason why we are very confident about our marking procedures (and also a reason why College rules do not allow students to challenge marks on the basis of academic judgment).

h. The process described under points f, g and h also applies to dissertations. The Department also has the right to ask a student who has written a dissertation to take an oral examination (viva) on it.

i. Dissertation feedback is offered in specific forms that reflect the Department’s publicly available marking criteria and mark descriptors.

j. The next stage of the process involves the sub-boards of examiners. These sub-boards bring together all academics responsible for our modules as well as the external examiners and meet in June. There are two formal meetings for undergraduate students (one for PPH and one for the rest of our u/g programmes) and one for postgraduate programmes. This is when major decisions are made collectively with regards to marks as well as student progression. During these meetings the external examiners raise any issues they want to raise and the Department offers its response. The external examiners also provide a written report to which the Department must also provide a written reply.

k. The power to formalise all marks rests only with the College-level boards of examiners which also use their own (separate) external examiners. They meet in July (u/g) or December (p/g).

l. Once the sub-boards have met the Department informs in writing the students who need to re-submit coursework, re-sit exam(s) or re-take a module while all other students are notified of their marks.

m. In the exceptional cases where student work is submitted over the summer, it is marked in September and any progression-related decisions are made (again collectively) in late September.

n. From 2015-16 onwards, a cap at the pass mark will apply for re-assessment. In other words, students who fail an assessment for the first time in 2015-16 and are awarded a reassessment opportunity, will have their reassessment mark capped. This cap will not apply if a student is required to re-take a module (re-taking a module also involves attending all sessions).

Dionyssis G. Dimitrakopoulos 3rd December 2015
Chair of the u/g Politics sub-board of examiners
Chair of the p/g College Board of Examiners (Arts & Law)